Weegee's* Secrets

OF SHOOTING WITH PHOTOFLASH

AS TOLD TO MEL HARRIS

75¢

*Author of NAKED CITY, WEEGEE'S PEOPLE and NAKED HOLLYWOOD

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post-processing scanned pages with ScanTailor and compiling by BBSC

INTRODUCING MR. FLASH BULB

About thirty years ago a young lad, equipped with a pony and a camera, roamed the streets of New York in search of clients. After a busy day of photographing children on the pony, nights were spent developing and printing. Mornings were devoted to the art of salesmanship- which few parents could resist. Price ranged anywhere from fifteen cents to a half dollar, depending upon how many flights of stairs Weegee had to climb.

Thus began the career of one of the country's most fabulous news photographers.

Weegee served an apprenticeship in the darkroom of Acme Newspictures, then went on to free lance with the streets of New York as his studio. He operated out of a small room behind Manhattan Police Headquarters, equipped with an official fire bell and police radio which were always operating. He slept with one ear constantly tuned to the pulse of his city.

In time the name *Weegee* became legendary, descriptive of a different kind of photograph . . . one that captured the exciting drama of life. Pathos, humour, tragedy—all these were sensitively etched on film by one who loved and understood people. Weegee felt at home photographing a police line-up, a five alarm fire, as well as socialites on opening night at the Metropolitan Opera House.

After the publication of his "Naked City" and "Weegee's People," he went to Hollywood. After four years he returned to New York with several thousand photographs taken in Hollywood.

I first met him in a Sixth Avenue camera shop. He mentioned the pictures and suggested that they could possibly be edited into a book. I vaguely expressed interest in the project and we parted. At two A.M. the next morning, Weegee deposited two thousand photographs on the floor of my home. For the next six months we arranged, selected and captioned pictures. This collaboration resulted in NAKED HOLLYWOOD, a pictorial satire of the film capital.

After watching him work on several assignments, I suggested he write the story of how he takes his pictures and that's how this booklet was born. We both hope "Weegee's Secrets" will provide the formula for better pictures.

MEL HARRIS
Co-author of "Naked Hollywood"

This photo was taken on "Navy Day." Everyone was photographing the ships and dignitaries. I snapped this kid.

CHAPTER I

"CANDID" REFLECTIONS

In the past twenty-two years, I have taken about ninety-eight percent of all my pictures with flash. Practically all were unposed. Mind you, I'm not saying the only good pictures are candid ones. Far from it . . . some of the most beautiful pictures in the world are posed . . . but the only pictures that I like to take are the ones that catch and preserve the movement of life.

I have always been asked, "Weegee, how do you manage to get that lifelike quality in your pictures?"

"Very simply," I'd reply. "I see a good picture and snap it." This answer never seemed to satisfy anyone. People thought that I was holding out on them . . . that I was keeping my secrets to myself. Actually, it *is* as simple as that—*I see a picture and snap it.*

You see, I've been taking pictures for so long that it has become second nature to me. I don't have to think about what I'm doing . . . it's like driving a car. Yet, unconsciously, I do make use of a plan every time I take a picture . . . good pictures don't just happen they're created.

When I first started, I had to be aware of the rules of photography. It is these rules or principles that I'd like to talk about.

But is it art?

Let's spend a moment on the qualities of a good photograph. These vary with the type and purpose of the photo . . . there are passport, medical, industrial photos, etc. . . . all intended to do a specific job. A passport photo, for instance, should merely identify someone . . . it would be foolish to judge it by any artistic standards. Another type is the "salon" print, as it is called. Here the important factors are print quality, proper relationship of light and shadow, composition, etc. The purpose of this type is decorative and certainly has a place in the modern home.

However, the type of picture featured in this book, captures a *dramatic moment in life*. It does the impossible by making time

stand still . . . it freezes an emotion, an event . . . on film. It's as if you reached out and caught the very breath of life and preserved it for all time. Most wonderful of all, it has the power to recreate the entire emotional experience many years later. Incidentally, light, shadow and composition are of secondary importance here. This doesn't mean that the photo may not have these qualities . . . as a matter of fact, as you progress, you'll instinctively frame your picture so that a good composition is achieved.

Even if you don't . . . it's still art.

Candid varieties

There are two types of candid shots—*planned* and *spontaneous*. I know it sounds strange. Whoever heard of a candid shot that was planned . . . or one that wasn't spontaneous?

By planned I mean the kind of photo that you can think about and analyze . . . where there is the opportunity for re-photographing. For instance—photos of your immediate family, friends and everyday happenings can be planned even though you click the shutter on a spontaneous moment. You could study the situations very carefully, deciding on the most interesting angles, and . . . if the pictures don't turn out successfully, you could take them over.

On the other hand, pictures of weddings, birthday parties, news events, etc., come only once. You've got to catch it the first time . . . there is no re-shooting.

In either event, the trick is to get the candid quality into *all* your pictures . . . that's what gives them the *natural* look.

CHAPTER II

THE QUESTION OF "ATTITUDE"

Painting with light

A photographer is like a painter. Instead of canvas he uses film . . instead of brushes he uses a lens . . . and instead of paint he uses light.

These three things are pretty fool-proof. Nowadays film and cameras are manufactured to careful specifications . . . and thanks to the miracle of the flash bulb, you can have "LIGHT – *where* you want it . . . and *when* you want it." Yes – the mechanical aspects of photography have been perfected to such a degree that it's a cinch to take a well-exposed pleasing picture . . . simply load your camera with film, insert a Westinghouse flash bulb, take aim, shoot . . . and presto! a picture. *But*, there's one more ingredient that should go into a photo – ATTITUDE . . . this makes the difference between an ordinary photograph and a great one.

In all my lectures and magazine articles, I always stress this point.

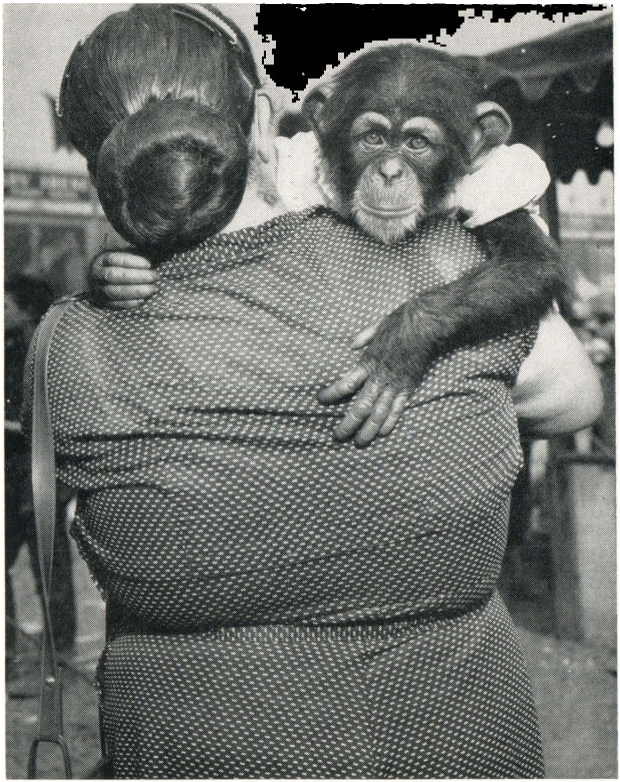
Now just what is this thing called attitude. You can't buy it. It doesn't come wrapped in a package. Yet, without it, it is impossible to produce a picture that has life. Actually, your attitude is a combination of many things.

For one thing, you've got to love what you're doing. You just can't take a good picture with a 'let's get it over' attitude. Good photographs, like good paintings, must be carefully thought out.

For another, you've got to be relaxed. A nervous photographer not only misses the good pictures, but also upsets the subject, so, be at ease . . . especially in the handling of the camera.

Get the feel of your camera

Practice inserting a *used* flash bulb into the gun, clicking the shutter and removing the bulb. Keep on doing this until you become so familiar with the whole process that you can do it in the dark. Walk around the room focusing on various subjects.



Hollywood street scene.

When you get to the point where you can handle the camera without thinking about it, you're ready to shoot pictures. This way you can concentrate on the subject and not have to worry about the camera.

A word about shutter speeds and distances. Some photographers get so involved in calculations that by the time they're ready to shoot there is no picture. I use a simple system of pre-focusing. In the chapter on technical notes, Page 45, I take this up.

Camouflage

This is a term used when something or somebody fades into the background and that's just what a successful photographer should do. Years ago a photographer couldn't help sticking out like a sore thumb . . . what with cumbersome lights and wires that everyone tripped over. In the early days of flash powder, people scampered for cover whenever the photographer came on the scene. But today, thanks to the miracle of the Westinghouse flash bulb, the photographer actually becomes part of the scene he's photographing, aiming his camera silently and swiftly.

Anticipate—for best results

The last and most important point is *antici ation*. This means to know what is going to happen . . . *before it happens*. This is not as mystical as it sounds. To give you an extreme and somewhat ridiculous example . . . suppose you saw a train racing north at sixty miles an hour and, from the other direction, a train was racing south on the same track. Well, you wouldn't have to be a fortune teller to know that unless the engineers took some fast action, *something was going to happen*.

A few years back when I was taking pictures for my first book, NAKED CITY, something happened which illustrates this quality of anticipation. I was at the foot of Father Duffy's monument, right in the middle of Times Square . . . the favorite eating place of all the pigeons . . . when I heard a cry of disappointment. A young amateur photographer had just missed a wonderful picture and was unhappily bemoaning his fate. It seems a little child

had run into the midst of the pigeons trying to catch them. The pigeons were scurrying up all around her and she was waving her little hands with a wild look of glee on her face. It was truly a wonderful opportunity . . . and the young photographer had missed it. But he shouldn't have, if he had only kept his wits about him . . . and *anticipated*. Ten seconds before, the child had broken away from her mother and run towards the pigeons. Ten seconds . . . time enough to get your camera in position and wait for the dramatic moment. You don't wake up after the precious moment is gone and say, "That would have been a good picture."

A good photographer knows when that moment is coming . . . *and is ready for it.*

A photographer is a hunter with a camera, alert, with his senses keen, with his mind in tune with what is going on around him ready to click the shutter on the dramatic moment . . . the moment that never comes back.

Below, on this page, is a series of pictures which illustrates anticipation. I think they are among the finest I have ever taken. They appeared in LOOK magazine as well as NAKED CITY. The story of how I got them is interesting. They were taken at the New York Paramount Theatre when Frank Sinatra was appearing there. My editor sent me out to get a picture of bobby soxers

These pictures are not posed. This girl actually swooned

swooning before Frank Sinatra. Some assignment . . . there I was in the theatre with thousands of hysterical bobby soxers and I was supposed to pick out the one among them who would swoon. I looked around until I found one girl who was very emotional, vibrant, and who appeared to me a likely candilate for a swoon. I set up my camera and waited. Sure enough, she came through.

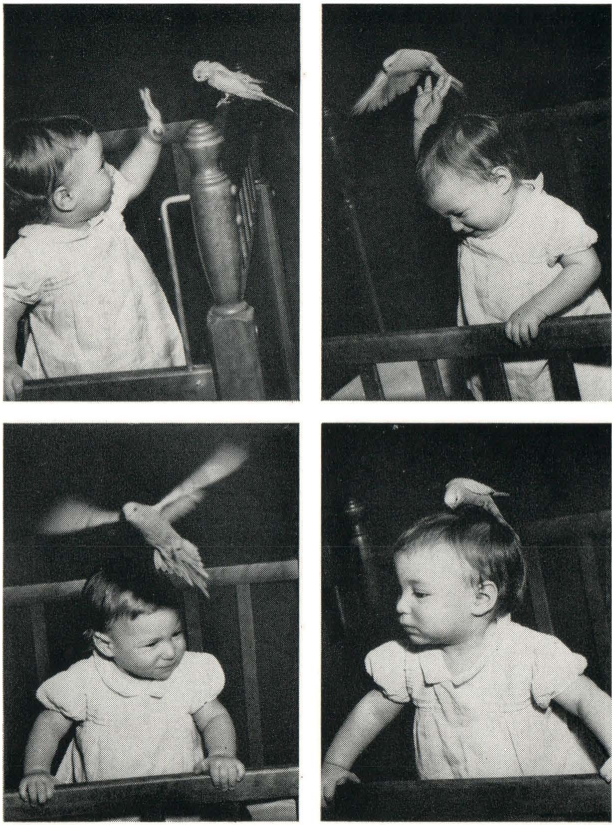
You"ll notice that these pictures were taken in sequence. This is a good way to get dramatic action. You anticipate the scene . . . take the picture before the action . . . take the action . . . then you shoot the aftermath.

Observe—as well as look

This sense can be developed by training yourself to be aware. When walking in the street or riding a bus, look around you, notice the people, study their movements, their faces. See if you can anticipate their actions. When you're going from one place to another, don't ignore the in-between. Study the life that is going on about you, the children playing, the couple quarrelling in the doorway, the old man rummaging in the ash can. Observe everything . . . *observation is a part of anticipation.*

When your intellect and your instinct work together as a team, you've *got* to take good pictures.

when she heard Frank Sinatra at the Paramount Theatre.



Francine frolics with her frivolous parakeet.

CHAPTER III

HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH CHILDREN

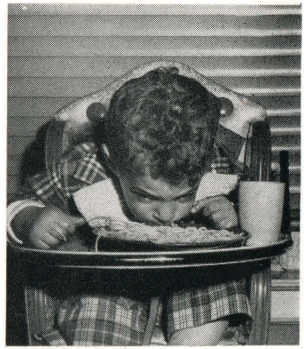
Next to bathing beauties, the most photographed subject in the world is a baby . . . hardly a home is without one. Casually ask any papa how his child is and, quick as a flash, he whips out a wallet full of photos and proudly displays them.

(I use babies as an example. The technique described here can apply to any number of subjects and situations . . . friends, relatives, club meetings . . . in fact, anybody or anything that provides an opportunity for observation.)

Photographing your baby comes under the planned candid category. The first thing you do is get to know your child (or sister, brother, nephew or neighbors' child, as the case may be). That's right . . . I said, *get to know him.* Oddly enough, most parents don't really know their children. They have a vague, overall conception of a little bundle of sunshine but they don't really know the child's personality. Spend some time observing him. Don't be in a hurry to load your camera and shoot . . . there's plenty of time . . . the child will be with you for quite a while. Make notes as you go along jotting down the highlights. At what time the child gets up . . . eats . . . bathes. Or if he's older, the kind of games he plays . . . how . . . what he does that's interesting. What are the things that makes your child individual . . . different from other children? He may have an unusual way of eating, walking, laughing. There are the things which give a photograph the desirable quality of "life."

Professional photographers use various tricks in photographing children. They wet the child's lips with orange juice and photograph him trying to lick it off. They put some chocolate or syrup on his finger tip and photograph him with his finger to his mouth. These tricks are all right for certain kinds of portraits but they don't really show the child and his own personality. They make all children look alike.

What you want to do is photograph the child in the act of living his own life.



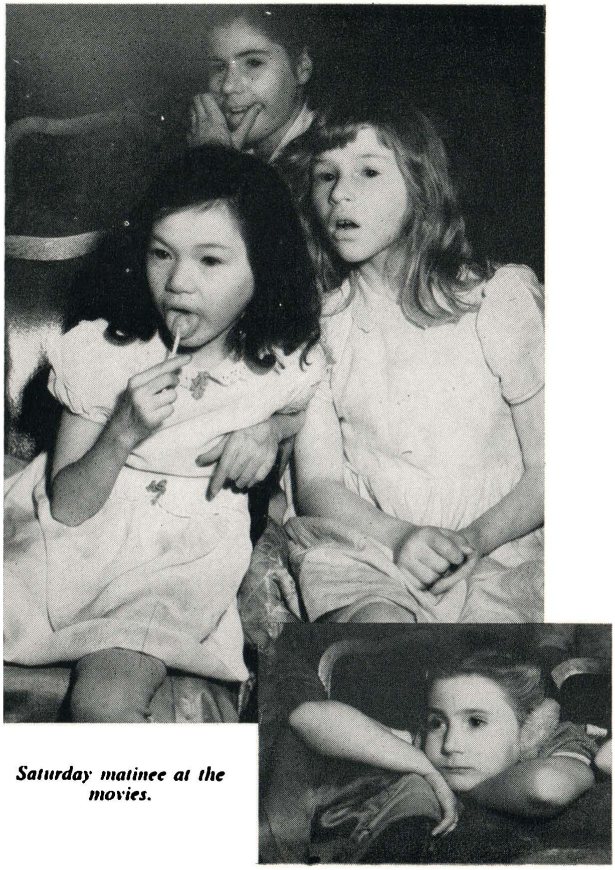
Gourmet.

When you're ready to shoot, have a pretty good idea of what you're going after . . . have a "shooting script" on hand with all of the things you want carefully planned. Follow the subject around waiting for the highlights. Naturally, many new and unexpected things will present themselves . . . but you'll be amazed the way you anticipate the dramatic moments. Stay in the background, yet in close contact. Don't try to make the child do what you think he should, what he does naturally will be much more interesting. Every child is a natural-born actor.

The result will be a true, fascinating record of your child's life against the background of his natural surroundings . . . *his home.*

Incidentally, if you have a pet, by all means include it in the pictures . . . they never fail to add interest.

If you have a chair or piece of furniture that you expect to have in the family for a long time, photograph him next to it at regular intervals. After a few years spread all the photos out and notice the development of the growing child. This contrast with an inanimate object will be startling and amusing. Try to keep the chair and camera in the same position for each shot.



Saturday matinee at the movies.

Wrong

Right

CHAPTER IV

HOW TO PUT "LIFE" INTO PARTY PICTURES

Everbody wants to get into the picture

I don't know why, but when you take out a camera at a gathering, it's the signal for everyone to stop what they're doing and start posing. I overcome this by gathering them all in a group, saying, "Okay, ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to shoot your picture. Now, after this is taken, forget about me. Go about your business, laugh, sing, enjoy yourselves." After the first few flashes they do ignore me.

Walk around, mingle with everybody. When anyone starts to pose, turn away, don't take their picture . . . in time they'll get

the point. Take only the pictures you think are interesting. A group may be singing old fashioned songs around a piano . . . this usually makes an interesting photo. Every party has its quota of intellectuals . . . if they get into a heated discussion about politics or art . . . take their picture. You'd be surprised at the expressions on their faces in the course of such a discussion. Don't take the commonplace . . . look for unusual perspectives . . . lie on the floor and shoot upwards, if you feel like it. Incidentally, an old trick is to walk behind someone, call out his name and take his picture as he turns around. The result is a startled and often amusing picture.

Concentrate on animation . . . *get plenty of action.*

Birthday parties

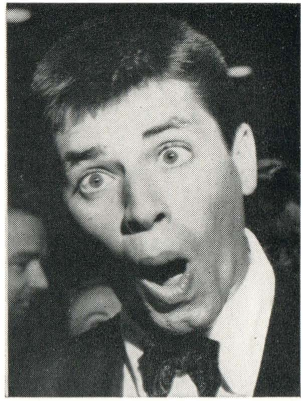
Photographing children's birthday parties should be fun but so often is a fiasco. Plan some of the highlights before hand . . . blowing out the candles . . . cutting the cake . . . everyone singing 'Happy Birthday' . . . and then the games. Don't forget, the kids aren't there to pose for you . . . they're out to have a good time. Don't spoil everything by asking them to get into all sorts of positions for your convenience.

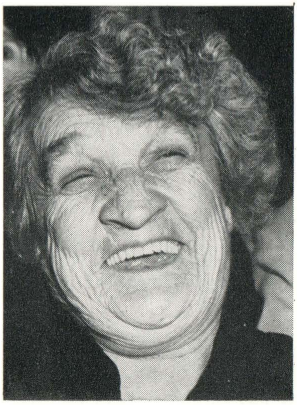
Eat some ice cream yourself . . . get into the mood.

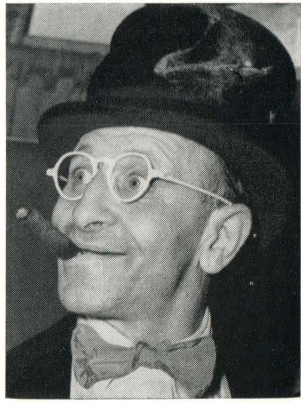
For heaven's sake, keep the parents out of the room. Nothing is more exasperating than a half dozen parents all shouting directions at their children. This will only freeze expressions . . . the only thing frozen should be the ice cream.

For an interesting record of the event, try the sequence formula. Take a few shots of the preparation for the party . . . everyone scampering about . . . arranging the table . . . hanging the decorations, etc. After you have taken the party, including the dressing of the last remaining guests, take the final result . . . *cleaning up the entire mess.*

Don't forget to have plenty of Westinghouse flash bulbs on hand. Nothing is more tragic than running out of them at a crucial time. Allow yourself plenty of shooting space. This is very important if you have a small room. Don't put the table in the center, put it on one side so that you can maneuver.







Character studies.

CHAPTER V

HOW TO PUT "CHARACTER" INTO PORTRAITS

How often have you seen a picture of a friend of yours that looked like him . . . and yet—didn't. The features were there . . . hair, eyes, nose, etc., but somehow the whole thing did not add up to the person you know.

Too many portraits reveal a face that was frozen into position for the occasion, where an expression, a smile has been held long enough for the camera to catch. The stiffffness and tension which the model felt comes through on the picture itself.

Actually we see people not as frozen images, but as animated beings . . . their character and personality is projected through individual mannerisms . . . the way they smile, talk, laugh, even think. These are the things you should capture in a portrait, these are the qualities which give a portrait character.

A good portrait should emphasize those qualities which make a person an individual . . . naturally, these should be attractive qualities . . . if someone has a front tooth missing then don't make him smile.

Flash photography makes this kind of picture possible.

The first thing to do is put your subject at ease . . . create an atmosphere of informality. Tell him to forget that he is there for the purpose of having his picture taken . . . to relax.

It's important that the subject not be aware of the precise moment the picture is shot. Set the camera on a tripod or table, centered on the subject . . . engage him in conversation, study his expressions very carefully, notice any characteristics which are interesting and at the same time *flattering*.

When you have a pretty good idea of the things you want to catch, anticipate them and catch the expression at its peak. After the first few flash bulbs, he'll get used to the idea.

Talk about things which interest him . . . a hobby perhaps . . . always keep your eyes on his face and your trigger finger ready.

With this technique you should achieve some very gratifying results. You may have to learn to say "no" to a good many friends and relatives who will want this type of candid portraiture.

This was taken at the scene of the murder of a small time racketeer. It isn't difficult to see who the curious onlookers are . . . and which one is the relative. This was one of the first of my pictures purchased by the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

CHAPTER VI

HOW TO CATCH "THE DRAMA OF LIFE" IN NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

AUTHOR'S NOTE—*(News photography is my meat. I've spent over twenty-five years "shootin' the news". . . I can't remember a time when I didn't have my camera by my side, on the prowl for a "scoop." I've dabbled in all sorts of photography . . . documentary, portrait, movie, but my first love is still following (or preceding) the police cars and fire engines. All of this means that I think, essentially, in terms of news photography . . . yet, after I finished writing the following chapter, I realized that almost all of the photo principles and rules I mentioned can apply equally as well to any other kind of photography . . . babies, parties, social gatherings, etc. After all, the qualities of dramatic interest should be a part of every photograph.)*

Are you thinking of news photography as a career or hobby? In either case it can be exciting . . . *and* profitable. You may not know it, but chances are *you* are a news photographer . . . in a way. Did you ever photograph a party . . . little sister taking her first step . . . or a friend posing next to a large fish he just caught? These are all news photographs . . . they record specific events. It's true they may be important to only a few people, but they are news. Let it be the party of a movie star . . . or the first step of a prince . . . or the President posing with the fish and you have what are called news pictures. The difference lies in the importance of the people photographed, not the event itself.

So, at heart, everyone is a news photographer.

One of the most frequent questions people ask me is, "How do you become a news photographer? Is it difficult to sell pictures? Do you have to know somebody?" Well, all I can say is when I sold my first picture to the New York World Telegram I didn't know anybody. The picture was bought purely on its merits.

Recently LIFE magazine stated that it had 34,000,000 photographers on its staff. What they mean, of course, is that everyone with a camera is a potential photographer for LIFE . . . that

everyone can conceivably take a picture that LIFE would be interested in publishing. Suppose something happened in your town and you photographed it . . . if it had news value, then all the newspapers and magazines of the world would be interested in it . . . regardless of who you are.

It is the picture that counts, not you!

You'd be surprised at the great number of photographs supplied to the magazines and newspapers by freelance photographers and amateurs. After all, it would be impossible to have a staff photographer in every city, town and corner in the United States . . . and you never know where something will happen. In these instances, it's the people on the spot with the camera who take the pictures. *It could be you.*

For you youngsters . . . news photography can be a career. For those of you who already are established . . . think of it as a hobby. In either case it's fun.

Get a police radio

It's illegal to have a police radio in your car, without permission, but—you can have one in your home. Get one that picks up police signals and listen for interesting leads.

With the radio, a camera and a supply of Westinghouse flash bulbs, you're in business.

What makes a good news picture?

As I said, important people make news . . . even if they do unimportant things. Whenever a senator goes to Europe it makes the columns. On the other hand, little people can also make the news . . . *when they do important things.* Mama and Papa Dionne hit every front page in the world when they had quintuplets. *When an important person does something important . . . that's really hot.*

Human interest

Look through today's paper or magazine. Chances are you'll

see a few pictures that have what is called *human interest*. Pictures about babies . . . pets . . . ordinary people involved in humorous situations. These are sure fire.

Just the picture of the pet or baby is not enough, there's got to be something interesting involved, such as the photo of the fireman holding the puppy that had been rescued from the fire (see Page 24) . . . or the crying child in front of the lost children's shelter at the beach (see Page 25) . . . or a girl stuffing a hot dog into the mouth of her boy friend at the circus (see Page 25).

These aren't pictures of important events but they do show people in very *human* situations. This type of photo will always interest picture editors. So – go where there are people . . . where there is life – at the carnival . . . at the beach . . . in the park . . . in fact – *everywhere.*

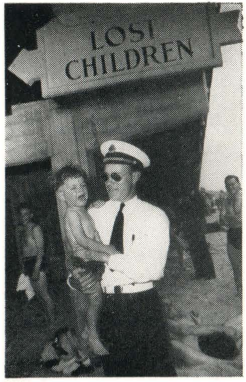
Uniqueness

Editors are always on the lookout for the unusual, the different, for the picture that tells an unusual story – or the same story, *in an unusual way*. Every once in a while, you see a picture of someone who made a violin out of match sticks. This is always news. Automobile accidents are a dime a dozen and usually aren't worth photographing . . . however – freak accidents are always newsworthy. If an automobile goes off a high road and lands in a tree or on top of another car, that is unique . . . and saleable.

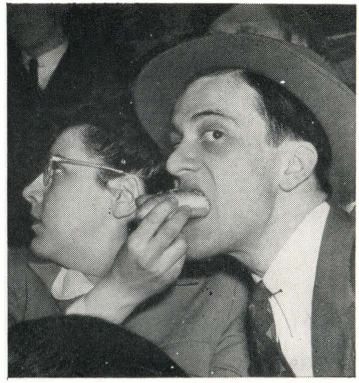
Go on a hunting expedition, ask all your friends and acquaintances if they know anyone who is doing something unusual. Look through the classified directory for odd occupations; you may find something that is worth photographing.

I remember several years back, during a lull, I answered an ad by someone who offered to teach tattooing . . . it made an interesting news story which I sold to the syndicates. In New York City there is an organization called The Bell Club which consists of people who follow the fires. They have bells in their clubroom which ring whenever a fire alarm sounds. They reach the scene of the fire with the firemen and assist by bringing them coffee, running messages, etc. They are called 'Buffs'. . . and it's interesting how they got their name. Years ago they used to attend fires

This pup almost became a "hot dog."



Sunday at the beach.



. . . at the circus.

wearing buffalo coats . . . I did a picture story on them and it was very successful.

I'm sure there is some material in your town that you can dig up that is unique and could be of interest . . . by all means shoot it and take it to the nearest newspaper office.

When I was in Hollywood shooting pictures for my book NAKED HOLLYWOOD, I was attending a premiere . . . when I saw a woman holding an unusual contraption. In order to see the stars over the heads of the throng, she was using a strange kind of periscope . . . I photographed her looking through it. My instinct told me to stick with it . . . that something unusual might happen, and sure enough it did. She walked around for a while, felt tired and sat down on the periscope which was fitted out as a seat to accommodate her. These pictures are shown on Page 26.

Don't forget, photograph the unusual and if you don't see it, search for it, you'll find it.

. . . submerge.

Symbolism

Sometimes the part is more powerful than the whole. This is a good rule to follow in taking pictures . . . especially *news* pictures. You've heard the expression 'All hands on deck'. . . actually by hands we mean the entire body – legs and shoulders included, but somehow the use of the word *hand* to describe the whole thing has a certain kind of emphasis. Many pictures make use of this approach.

Let's assume a tornado passed through a town. True, a picture of the twister lifting a house from its roots would be dramatic . . . yet, on the other hand, a picture of a broken doll and bits of furniture lying in the street can build up the story of the tragedy even more effectively.

Contrary to popular belief, editors are not a blood-thirsty lot. They don't like to show an accident in all its gory detail.

Since all automobile accidents look alike, more or less, the clever photographer picks out a symbol for the accident—such as a pair of shoes lying in the road . . a closeup of the speedometer showing at what speed the car had the accident . . an empty bottle of whiskey on the seat . . . or a suitcase thrown open with its contents on the road.

When you get to the scene of an accident, look around you. Try to take in the entire scene as quickly as possible . . . pick out the highlight . . . see if you can give it an unusual twist. Don't be satisfied with photographing the scene just as everyone else does, see if you can pick out one little thing that will give it character.

About ten years ago, at 2 A.M., I was cruising through the streets of New York in my 1938 Chevvy . . . when my police radio picked up a signal 32—which could mean anything. I sped to the west side waterfront where someone had decided to end it all by jumping into the river . . . I looked out and saw a policeman struggling with the would-be suicide. By this time a small crowd had begun to gather . . . among them were some news photographers. We all waited for the rescuing policeman and bather to come into range and started shooting. When the cop and the victim, in this case a beautiful blonde, were dragged onto the pier, the flash bulbs really started popping . . mine included. As soon as the photographs were taken, all the photographers scampered off to their newspaper offices . . . but something bothered me. I wasn't satisfied with just a picture that everyone else had taken . . . I had to get something different. I looked around . . . there at the end of the pier was what I wanted. Before the cop jumped in, he took off his hat, coat, shoes and pants which he rolled up in a bundle to hide and also protect his gun . . . placed them on the edge of the pier and created the perfect symbol of the entire incident. I shot this "still life" picture before the cop retrieved his belongings. (See Page 28.)

In addition to the unusual pictures of the rescue which are dramatic enough, I was able to bring to my editor the picture which made the whole sequence pictorially powerful—the symbol.

Mute testimony to a cop's heroism.

Get the key picture—and the sidelights

Every news event lends itself to a key picture . . . the picture which shows the highlight and tells the story at a glance. After you've arrived on the scene and taken this major picture, look around for sidelight shots. They help round out the story.

I once covered the crash of an airplane into a group of suburban homes. Immediately, I took the main or key picture, which in this case was a general view of the destruction caused by the crash. After taking this shot, I sent it back by courier to my newspaper . . . then, having a little time, I looked around for the sidelight pictures. Lo and behold, of all things, I saw a few souvenir hunters carrying off a motor of the destroyed plane . . . as a momento. I also photographed a man picking wreckage out of his back yard with a rake . . . as well as the rescue crews at work.

Related subjects

I once had an aunt who never threw anything away. Odd buttons . . . bits of colored ribbon . . . empty eyeglass cases all found their way into an old cardboard box called her *treasure chest.* Each deposit was accompanied with "I'll use it someday."

Oddly enough, she did. When she died we opened the box expecting to find it full of the accumulation of years . . . all we found were a handful of items.

If she had lived a little longer, these too would have been used.

Every photographer should have his own treasure chest. After collecting odds and ends for a while, spread them out in front of you. It's surprising how pictures made under totally different circumstances take on a related quality. Suppose you snapped a picture of a man bending over to tie his shoe lace . . . months later you snapped a fat lady doing the same . . . or a policeman. Put them all together and you can have a very interesting character study of the way people tie their shoe laces.

You could leave it to chance and relate them after you'd collected many pictures . . . or . . . you could go about it in an organized way. Think about a particular subject, theme or action or even a piece of architecture that you might be interested in . . . whenever you see another example, shoot it . . . before you know it you'll have a saleable, related series.

This approach is more applicable to magazine rather than newspaper stories. I used this related technique extensively in NAKED HOLLYWOOD . . . it's very effective in achieving satire.

Action—and reaction

Throw a pebble out into a lake . . . watch the water rings spread and touch the shore. Almost every incident . . . an accident . . . a fire . . . a parade . . . even a loud noise, just like the pebble, has an effect on its surroundings, sometimes the reaction of people is more interesting than the incident itself.

Watch the faces of people at a circus. You could almost tell just what a tightrope walker is doing merely by audience reaction. Their wide eyes and gaping mouths signal the beginning of a

hazardous leap . . . a momentary look of fright will tell you the performer had a near accident . . . and a sigh of relief announces that he reached the other side safely.

When you arrive at a scene you want to photograph, first take the key picture . . . then move as close as you can to the area where the "pebble" dropped . . . and look all around you. See if you can catch the drama of the event, mirrored in the people themselves. Observe . . . select . . . and be quick to shoot.

This "reaction" technique is more effective when the incident itself is not particularly unusual . . . as I said, one fire or accident is pretty much the same as another. But, I would have been a fool to photograph expressions on faces when I covered the burning of the famous Hindenburg Zeppelin.

I remember one fire I was photographing, in New York's East Side . . . I went inside the police lines and looked out at the crowd . . . a mother and daughter were looking at the flames eating up their home. The anguish in their faces told the story more powerfully than any flames could. (See below.)

This mother and daughter were watching another daughter and her child burn to death. I cried when I made this picture.

Contrast

A picture of a tramp sitting on a park bench can be very interesting . . . sometimes. This also applies to a picture of a man in high hat and tails. But—snap them both on the same park bench, and you have one of the most forceful, ironical features in photography . . . *contrast.*

Everything in life is placed against a background like a stage setting. An accident, an event, does not exist in a vacuum . . . isolated from everything around it. Then don't treat it that way . . . don't concentrate on just the subject alone. When you come to a scene you want to photograph, look all around, notice everything. See if there is one thing against which the subject may be photographed that will give punch to the whole picture. Often this can be achieved by actually walking all around the subject, whatever it is, looking at it from every possible perspective, and viewing the subject in relation to the background. You may turn an ordinary picture into a top one.

Let me give you an example.

One night I was at the scene of an automobile accident . . . someone was hit by a car . . . I arrived in time to see the cops covering the body with newspapers. Had I simply focused on the victim, the editor would have thrown the picture into the waste paper basket . . . where it would have belonged. I looked around quickly, and there above the entire scene, was a movie marquee with the words "Joy of Living". . . like the hand writing on the wall. It was a natural. (See Page 32.)

Signs and posters offer a potent background for contrast . . . many times people can be as effective. When I was in Hollywood getting material for NAKED HOLLYWOOD I would roam the streets for hours looking for suitable pictures. One night I saw a street corner evangelist . . . her face had character . . . she was playing the guitar and singing soulfully. True this would have made an interesting photo . . . but I wasn't satisfied. I wanted something more . . . I waited, and my patience was rewarded. A couple paused in the background . . . they had the love light in their eyes; I quickly moved into position framing the picture in my view finder . . . and snapped (see photo Page 33).

Double feature.

Music in the air.

This would have been just another auto accident shot, except—the car crashed into the store of an insurance broker and attorney. Notice cat underneath car.

People always ask me, "What is the best picture you ever took?" Without hestitation I answer, "A picture I took at the opening of the Metropolitan Opera House." I consider this to be my masterpiece.

Let me tell you a little about the story of the picture. The crime teletype machine was quiet at police headquarters . . . so I decided to go to the opening of the Opera. The Rolls-Royces, big and shiny, kept arriving. This was a big night for the photographers . . . the flash bulbs went off like fireworks on the Fourth of July. It was a cold night, and all the cameramen, including myself, were lined up inside the lobby taking posed shots of the socialites. I did this for a while . . . got bored . . . and decided to go outside to see if I could catch something different.

The Rolls-Royces kept on coming, out of one of them emerged two ladies. My flash bulb popped, and . . . the result . . . a picture that appeared in practically every newspaper and magazine throughout the world . . . was bought by the New York Museum of Modern Art . . . and is still being exhibited by museums throughout the country . . . *a study in contrast.* (See below.)

The Critic.

The large white spot in center is flames shooting out of a building. The smaller spots are snow flakes reflecting the flash light

CHAPTER VII

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S PLACE AT A FIRE

Watch out for fire hose

Many a photographer has broken his neck or camera . . . or both, tripping over hose which lie in the streets. This is easy to do when your eye is glued to the view finder and you move into position for a shot. Look where you are going.

If you arrive at the scene by car, do not ride over the hose . . . even if you see the mayor and fire chief doing it.

Stay away from the high pressure connection . . . if they break, which often happens, you are in for a soaking.

Don't throw used flash bulbs in the street

Not only do they create, a hazard . . . but, it will antagonize the authorities. Put them in your bag or pocket.

Boots

If you intend to make a habit of attending fires it is a good idea to equip yourself with a pair of fireman's boots. They come in handy when the water starts flowing.

Always carry a flashlight

There are a dozen uses for it at a fire.

Don't photograph firemen smoking

Firemen occasionally like to take a smoke. Before you photograph one, ask him to throw his cigarette away, he'll appreciate it.

It's the little fires that count

Large fires are covered by all the papers. Small ones are usually

Society for the prevention of cruelty to fire dogs.

ignored . . . here's where it is possible for you to get a scoop . . . actually they can provide just as much human interest as the spectacular ones. Cover them. Feature acts of heroism by firemen, cops, and even civilians.

Get all important data

These are useful to editors. Get names, addresses, extent of property damage, and whatever other information you think important. The fire chief will usually be glad to cooperate with you, ask him. Incidentally, it's a good idea to become acquainted with him . . . send him some prints of the fire, if possible with him included . . . you may get a fire badge out of it.

Don't have "coffee nerve"

Especially on cold nights neighbors and 'fire buffs' bring out pots of hot coffee . . . wait until the firemen have had their fill . . . then it is appropriate for you to have some yourself.

You can help the law

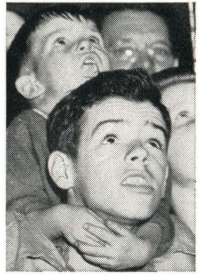
Make sure to get a crowd shot of all the spectators facing the camera. Sometimes the person who started it (pyromaniac) can be identified by the expression of delight on his face . . . if the same face shows up at all the fires, that, too, is a suspicious note . . . also if anyone seems to be enjoying himself too much, point him out to the authorities. Once at a fire a character was too anxious to help carry my case and asked if there was any way he could assist me. There was something about him that made me suspicious, he was having too much fun . . . I took his picture and pointed him out to the fire marshall.

After he was questioned, he admitted he started the fire for excitement.

By the way, not all fires are started by pyromaniacs . . . most are accidental.

After a while you will be able to distinguish between normal curiosity and abnormal enjoyment.

I was on my way to cover the shooting of a cop when I spotted this fire. . . had to promote a boat to get to this location.



Watching a dram

This girl being rescued didn't have time to put her shoes on, but she did grab her violin.

While his mistress is being treated, this pup watches faithfully over her.

Soon after the upper photo was taken the street blew up.

Actual photo of a burglar being caught in the act by detectives.

CHAPTER VIII

"PSYCHIC" PHOTOGRAPHY

It's all in the mind

In NAKED CITY I have included a chapter called "Psychic Photography." Don't confuse this with anticipation. Many times I have been drawn by some force to a particular place and arrived there just in time to photograph a murder or accident.

I remember one night I was walking in the heart of Chinatown. When I came to the corner of Pell and Mott Streets, something, I don't know what, made me stop and photograph the intersection. One minute after I took the photo . . . the street blew up. The water main pipes broke. There was a terriffic explosion . . . hundreds of tenement dwellers were driven from their homes. These two photos are shown on Page 42.

This sort of thing happens so many times that people asked me if I had a Ouija board or crystal ball. That's why I'm called "Weegee" which comes from Ouija. If you have this faculty, "psychic photography," then my advice to you is to quit whatever job you're working on and become a news photographer. You'll be rich overnight.

CHAPTER IX

HOW TO SELL YOUR PICTURES

A news picture is like any other commodity . . . it can always be sold if it's good. It is also a *perishable* commodity . . . so – act fast!

After you have taken your shots, phone the city desk of your favorite newspaper and describe the pictures you have taken. Chances are you will be told to hurry right up with the roll of film, that they will develop it in their own darkroom. If you turned in anything interesting you've made a sale. If you have your own darkroom at home, for heaven's sake *do not* develop and print your own pictures . . . this only wastes time . . . a picture that gets to the newspaper office too late is as useless as yesterday's weather report.

Be selective

Use your discretion . . . don't go running to the newspaper office after every accident, fire or special event, you'll wear out your welcome. In most cases, the incident will be covered by the regular staff photographers . . . no editor will buy a picture from you that he gets from them. If, on the other hand, you have a unusual, different approach to the subject that gives your picture individuality, submit it. You may have come on the scene before the other photographers . . . that would give you an edge on them, especially if you photographed something which no longer existed when they arrived.

In a previous chapter I suggested covering the small fires, the ones the newspaper didn't cover . . . you may get a bit of human interest that might appeal to the editors.

Naturally, if good fortune hands you a "scoop" . . . when the incident is important and you're the only one to photograph it, then you're in.

Magazines don't often go in for "spot news" . . . they are mainly interested in features. Don't send them rolls of undeveloped film . . . print the pictures first and send a story along. Familiarize yourself with the type of picture the various magazines use and send them pictures and stories slanted to their style.

Don't be afraid to submit things to editors . . . that's what they are there for . . . to discover new talent.

CHAPTER X

THE TECHNICAL SIDE OF FLASH

Somehow the idea of flash seems to frighten a lot of people . . . including many professionals. There seems to be an impression that flash photography is an involved and complicated process. Actually the opposite is true. Flash is simplicity itself. There's no worry about having enough light . . . the modern Westinghouse flash bulb is "bottled sunlight" and gives you the power to throw all the light you want—exactly where you want it.

Fixed-focus cameras

It's not the camera that takes the picture . . . but, the photographer. If you have a simple fixed-focus camera, with a lens opening and shutter speed that cannot be controlled, then you have no problem of focusing. Simply insert a Westinghouse flash bulb and shoot . . . the rest is a matter of experimenting. There are, however, several things you can do to assure yourself of good pictures almost from the beginning.

Take several pictures at different distances. Examine the finished prints and see at what distance you get the ideal picture . . . try to shoot all pictures, if possible, at this distance. Of course, sometimes this is difficult and, as in many things, you must make a compromise. At those distances where you are getting too much light, try placing a handkerchief or inexpensive flash bulb shield (sold at all camera stores) over the reflector . . . this cuts down the light.

The ideal bulb for this type is the SM Westinghouse Midget. Most cameras can use them . . . ask someone in your camera store if yours can.

Focus type cameras

With cameras where you can control focus, shutter speeds and lens openings, the best method of shooting is to follow the guide numbers on the Westinghouse flash bulb sleeve. The guide number

system works very simply. Let's say that the number for your particular film at two hundredths of a second is 160 and you're shooting ten feet from the subject. Divide the distance from the subject (in this case ten) into the guide number and you have the lens opening—F/16. This is the ideal way to shoot . . . but unfortunately, we don't always have ideal conditions . . . especially when covering news stories. By the time you use your range finder, get your distance and divide it into the guide number, the paper has gone to press. You can't make all action stand still while you go through your arithmetic.

If there is sufficient time, by all means use the guide number system . . . when you're in a hurry, you might try my system. (I confess I've used the guide system only a few times in my entire career.)

I use the Westinghouse No. 5 Midget Bulb for practically all of my shots . . . and shoot at two hundredths of a second using Super XX film. Through experience, I have found that the two best distances at which to shoot are six feet and ten feet. Indoors, my lens opening at six feet is F/22 and at ten feet it's F/16. Outdoors, where there is no reflected light from walls and ceilings, I open up to one stop to F/16 at six feet and F/11 at ten feet.

These two distances, six feet and ten feet, are ideal for practically any shot you might want to take, six feet for closeups and ten feet for full figure. I suggest that you practice familiarizing yourself with these distances so that you can, at any time, take a stand six feet or ten feet away from the subject. Practice at home with a tape measure or range finder, if your camera has one.

Don't worry about getting the distance accurate . . . at F/16 you have enough "depth of field" to give you sharp pictures even if you have miscalculated a foot or so either way.

Shooting on the spot

I come well prepared. I have a small flashlight in my pocket. I use this to set the scale on my camera in the dark. I set the scale for the kind of picture the situation calls for . . . a man being brought out on a stretcher, a prisoner being taken by the police . . . this calls for a ten foot shot (full figure). I get back about fifteen

feet, when the action I am photographing is within ten feet of the camera, I shoot. Always allow the action to come to you. Give yourself enough shooting space. In closeups, I set the scale on my camera for six feet . . . changing the stop from F 16 to F/22 and then I snap my picture. On cold days going into a building from the street, the lens will cloud causing foggy pictures. To eliminate this I always carry a lens tissue. If possible, I make an elevation shot. Whether inside or out, when there is excitement there will be obstacles (people, equipment, etc.) obscuring the view. So I always try and get on top of something, a desk, etc. I have found it best to have a solid camera case . . . this serves as a stool for long waits and, in an emergency, serves as an elevation point where needed.

CHAPTER XI

PUBLICITY FOR CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS

If your group is planning an affair or a drive of some sort, make use of pictures to gain publicity. Along with the release to the newspapers, send along a few photos. Try to make them of general interest . . . think of some gimmick that would make the pictures interesting to everyone, not only your club members. If you want to send a picture of an individual, have him doing something . . . don't just send a plain portrait.

Treat the whole thing as a newspaper assignment . . . it'll pay off in publicity.

If possible give the newspapers 8x10 glossy prints and try to submit all material as far in advance as you can.

CHAPTER XII

HOW TO USE FLASH IN SUNLIGHT

"What!" an amateur once said, to whom this suggestion was made, "Using flash in sunlight . . . isn't it like gilding the lily?"

The idea isn't as strange as it sounds. Most professionals have been doing it since the introduction of flash. It's true the sun throws a brilliant light, ideal for photography, but you can't control it . . . you can't bend it around corners and shift its direction to light up a section you think needs more light. It's not there for your photographic convenience.

A bright sun will light up one side of your subject and throw the other side into deep shadow. Sometimes you want this dramatic effect, in which case the sun is working *for* you. Other times you want detail in the shadows. If you expose for the shadows, the sunlit part becomes overexposed and almost pure white . . . here, the sun is working *against* you. Also, a person being photographed who's facing the sun squints and contorts his face into a pretty unflattering pose.

Once again, the Westinghouse flash bulb saves the day.

Primarily, flash is used when there is no other light, but it is very versatile . . . it can be used to fill in shadows. With skill it can give you a more natural picture . . . certainly a more pleasing one, by actually improving on nature.

Personally, I'm a bit prejudiced in favor of flash. I take practically all my pictures that way—midnight or high noon. As a news photographer, my main concern is to *get the picture*. I can't take a chance on losing an important shot because of a temperamental sun that sneaks behind a cloud just when I'm about to click the shutter. I use flash just as if the sun isn't there . . . this way I'm master of the situation.

Now don't go using flash indiscriminately . . there's a time and place for everything, including your trusty photo flash bulb. Before you actually shoot, examine the situation very carefully. Do you want a part of your picture in shadow? If not, does the shadow require a little "opening up" or a lot? *Think!*

Sunlight

Sunlight plus flash

Filling in shadow detail

Let's assume you're shooting a scene, and the sun is coming in from the left. If you expose for the light side, all the rest would be lost in shadow, yet you want detail to show. Use an exposure meter or reference guide to determine the correct exposure for the sunlit portion of your picture . . . set your camera for this exposure—let's say 1/100th at F/11. Then consult the flash exposure table on your Westinghouse carton sleeve for the correct distance your flash bulb should be from the subject. Now you're ready to shoot—*almost* . . . depending on the effect you want.

Let's look at the possible variations.

I suggested setting your camera for the daylight exposure. No

matter where your camera was placed, the setting for this would be constant, since the sun lights up the whole countryside equally. On the other hand, the light from your flash bulb illuminates the subject in relation to the distance . . . so you have to adjust this distance depending on how much flash light you want on the subject.

If the normal flash distance is ten feet for this 1/100th, F/11 setting and you shoot at ten feet, then all you are doing is neutralizing the sunlight and the result is a flat picture.

If you merely want to bring out some of the shadow detail without destroying the effect of sunlight and shade, then move back several feet . . . or, cover the flash reflector with a shield or handkerchief to cut down some of the light.

If you disregard the sunlight meter reading and set your camera up close for a normal flash shot, you may end up witn a picture that looks as if it was taken at night. Naturally, if your setting for daylight being 1/100th at F/11 and you shoot for flash at 1/200th at F/22 then you're not getting enough light for the daylight scene or even sky . . . the result—night shot.

Use the principles mentioned here for shooting people who may be in the shadow of a building or a group of trees. If you want an interesting photo where the dramatic effect of the sun's shadows are not eliminated then use flash merely to light up shadow . . cut down on the intensity of your flash.

Portraits in the sun

Look through your photo album . . . notice how everyone photographed in the sun squints. It's very difficult to have a relaxed, pleasant expression when the sun hits you straight in the eyes.

You can achieve a really beautiful effect of sunlight backlighting the hair by placing your subject with *back* or *side* to the sun, and using your flash to supply the necessary illumination for the face in shadow. Naturally, a pleasant smile is possible under these circumstances.

Use the data mentioned above as your guide.

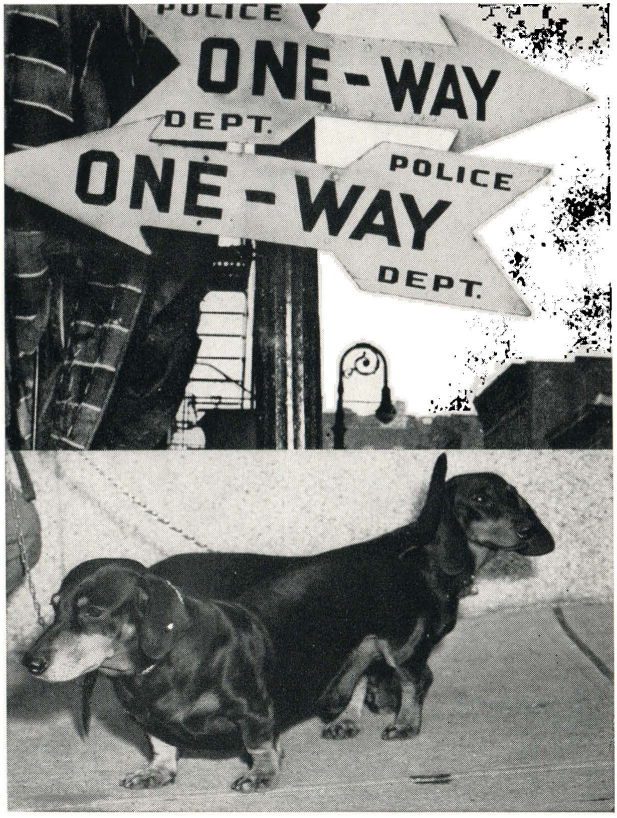
With practice you will eventually make Old Sol and flash work as a team.

W E E G E E ' S

G A L L E R Y

Weegee at work in his "office"

A PORTFOLIO OF PRIZE-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHS



Split personality.

It pays to advertise.

Kidnapped baby returned to its mother.

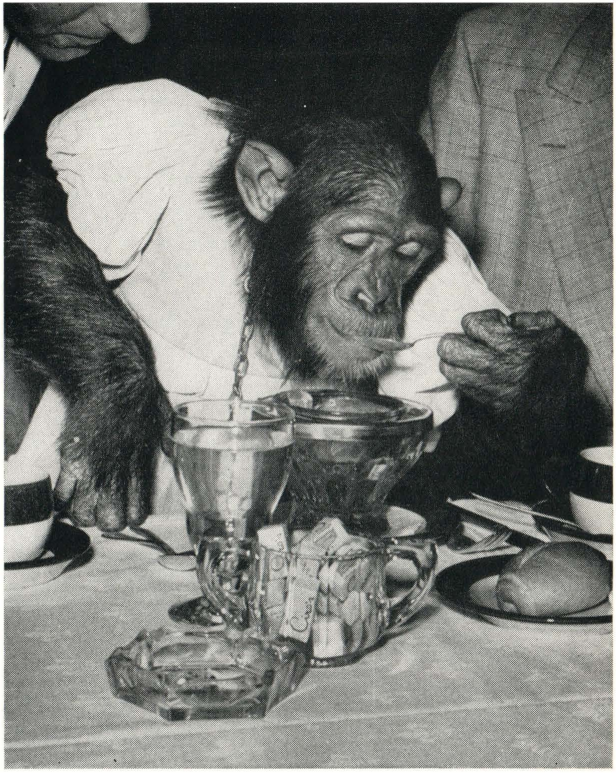
Air-conditioned dreams . . . tenement fire escape on a hot night.

Duke and Duchess of Windsor at the circus. This shot won me a medal and a lifetime supply of smokes from the Cigar Institute of America.

A stitch in time . at Coney Island.

. . . and a pinch of salt?

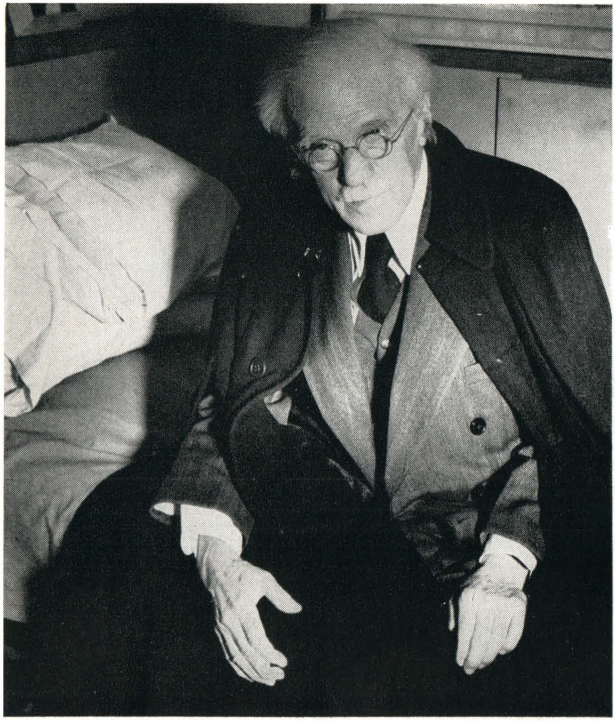
Hollywood Premier. Notice expressions on mother and daughter.



Dining out. Mr. Cheeta of Hollywood daintily samples "Consommé a la Tarzan."

Typical scene at Sammy's "Bowery Follies." That's Sammy (Mayor of the Bowery) bending over the couple.

Winter scene.



Alfred Stieglitz — father of modern photography.

STOP and GO RULES

FOR FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY

Do not shoot without checking all your flash equipment. Make sure all contacts, plugs, wiring are clean. Make sure you are using fresh batteries. Change them every three months or after about 100 flashes. Remove batteries from flashgun if you do not intend to use your equipment for sometime.

Do use the Westinghouse FLASH-CHEK bulb (available at all camera stores) before each shooting session. This handy little bulb shows you if everything is working okay. Don't risk losing a good shot because you didn't know your battery or equipment was faulty.

Do not use a bulb that is cracked or one that was dropped.

Carry your bulbs in the sleeve until you are ready to use them. This keeps them safe.

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